

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 OMB-01 CU-02 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01

AID-05 SAJ-01 SAM-01 NIC-01 /100 W
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R 270119Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5362

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMCONSUL SURABAYA

AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

AMCONSUL SYDNEY

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 1891

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: AS, PT, ID, PINT, PFOR

SUBJ: VISIT OF AUSTRALIAN ALP PARLIAMENTARIANS TO PORTUGUESE
TIMOR

REF: CANBERRA 1694

1. SUMMARY: MHR KEN FRY, ALP-FRASER, ONE OF SIX MEMBERS OF THE
ALP'S FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE COMMITTEE WHICH MADE A FIVE-DAY
VISIT TO PORTUGUESE TIMOR (REFTEL) BELIEVES GOA SHOULD SUPPORT
SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE AREA AND PROVIDE ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE
AS WELL. FRY BELIEVES THERE IS NO COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN
PORTUGUESE TIMOR, THAT FRETELIN COMMANDS THE SUPPORT OF THE VAST
MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION, AND THAT INDONESIAN PRESS ALLEGATIONS
CONCERNING PORTUGUESE TIMOR ARE WITHOUT FOUNDATION. END SUMMARY.

2. IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF MAR 26 FRY SAID SIX MAN PARTY OF
AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS HAD TRAVELLED THROUGHOUT PORTUGUESE
TIMOR VISITING REMOTE VILLAGES, AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH STATIONS,
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ISOLATED CHURCH MISSIONS, ETC. GOVERNOR PIRES AND HIS STAFF HAD

PROVIDED HELICOPTERS AND CARS TO ASSIST THEM.

3. FAY WAS IMPRESSED WITH PIRES AND HIS SEVEN TOP PORTUGUESE OFFICERS WHO CALLED THEMSELVES QTE THE DREAMERS. END QTE. THESE MEN ARE IDEALISTIC CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS WHO ARE STEERING THE COLONY TOWARDS SELF-DETERMINATION. HE WAS ESPECIALLY IMPRESSED BY THE IMPARTIAL MANNER IN WHICH THESE MEN ALLOWED ALL GROUPS TO PARTICIPATE FREELY IN POLITICAL LIFE. PIRES TOLD HIM THE GROUP WAS PLANNING TO HOLD ELECTIONS FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY WHICH WOULD THEN FUNCTION AS AN INTERIM LOCAL GOVERNING BODY CHARGED WITH DRAFTING A CONSTITUTION. THE CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY WOULD SIT FOR BETWEEN TWO TO FIVE YEARS.

4. FRY ALSO NOTED THAT HIS OPINION OF FRETELIN LEADER RAMOS HORTA ROSE WHEN HE SAW HIM OPERATE IN TIMOR. IN CANBERRA RAMOS HORTA WAS A RATHER INTEMPERATE HAND WAVER. IN EAST TIMOR HE WAS CALM, CONFIDENT AND OBVIOUSLY RESPECTED BY THE GRASS ROOT POPULATION. FRY BELIEVES FRETELIN AND THE UDT ARE SUPPORTED BY OVER 90 PERCENT OF THE PEOPLE OF EAST TIMOR. APODETI LEADERS WITH WHOM HE HAD TALKED CLAIMED THAT THEIR EFFORTS TO ATTRACT SUPPORTERS HAD BEEN BASED UPON THE IDEA THAT INDONESIA WOULD GIVE EAST TIMOR A DEGREE OF LOCAL AUTONOMY . APODETI LEADERS FELT THAT THE GOI HAD HURT THEIR CAUSE BY CLAIMING THAT IF INTEGRATED INTO INDONESIA, EAST TIMOR WOULD ONLY BE GIVEN QTE AUTONOMY CONSISTENT WITH THE INDONESIAN CONSTITUTION END QTE. FRY ALSO MET THE INDONESIAN CONSUL IN DILI, WHO DID NOT IMPRESS HIM. THE CONSUL ADMITTED THAT THE INDONESIAN PRESS STORIES ABOUT EAST TIMOR WERE PROPAGANDA, AND COMPLAINED ABOUT A LACK OF COMMUNICATION WITH JAKARTA.

5. GOVERNOR PIRES, WHO RETURNED FROM A VISIT TO JAKARTA AND PORTUGAL WHILE THE GROUP WAS VISITING, TOLD THEM THAT HE WAS ENCOURAGED BY REPEATED INDONESIAN ASSURANCES THAT EAST TIMOR WOULD NOT BE INVADED. HE ALSO TOLD THE GROUP THAT PORTUGAL WOULD NOT CUT THE COLONY OFF ABRUPTLY AND THAT THE REGULAR PORTUGUESE BUDGET ALLOCATION FOR EAST TIMOR AS WELL AS THE SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT FUND WOULD CONTINUE FOR THE INDEFINITE FUTURE.

6. FRY, WHO SERVED IN WORLD WAR II IN AN AUSTRALIAN "SPARROW" (I.E. COMMANDO) FORCE IN CELEBES, SAID THAT THERE WERE ABOUT 2,000 TIMORESE WHO HAD RECEIVED ADEQUATE MILITARY TRAINING AND ABOUT CONFIDENTIAL

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3,000 WHO HAD HAD SOME TRAINING. GIVEN THIS CADRE, THE DEGREE OF POLITICAL SUPPORT WHICH THE FRETELIN/UDT GROUP HAS, AND THE TERRAIN, HE PERSONALLY IS CONVINCED THAT GUERRILLA OPERATIONS COULD BE CARRIED ON INDEFINITELY IN EAST TIMOR. HE WAS ALSO GIVEN THE IMPRESSION BY FRETELIN SUPPORTERS THAT SOME STOCKS OF SMALL ARMS WERE ALREADY STASHED AWAY IN REMOTE AREAS.

7. FRY REPORTED THAT THE ECONOMY, SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE, AND

MEDICAL FACILITIES IN EAST TIMOR ARE PRIMITIVE. GOVERNOR PIRES AND HIS STAFF ARE AWARE OF THE MAGNITUDE OF THESE PROBLEMS AND OF THE FACT THAT THEY DO NOT HAVE THE PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE TO DEAL WITH THEM. FRY, WHO HAS WORKED AS AN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIST, BELIEVES THAT REAL PROGRESS IN AGRICULTURE COULD BE MADE. THE GROUP WHICH HAD VISITED TIMOR ARE RECOMMENDING THAT AUSTRALIA PROVIDE SOME IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE IN THE HEALTH AREA, AND DO A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF THE AREA'S ECONOMIC POTENTIAL. IN ADDITION, THE GROUP HAD ASKED THE GOA TO ASSIGN A CONSUL TO DILI. THEY HAD NOT BEEN GIVEN MUCH ENCOURAGEMENT BY OFFICIALS AT THE DFA BUT WERE WORKING ON THE RESPONSIBLE ALP MINISTERS. THE GROUP WAS AWARE THAT SUCH STEPS COULD ANNOY INDONESIA, BUT WERE CONVINCED THAT AUSTRALIA SHOULD STEP FORWARD TO ASSIST A SMALL AREA CLOSE TO ITS SHORES IN SOLVING ITS ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND ASSISTING IT TOWARDS SELF-DETERMINATION. THEY WILL KEEP PUBLIC PRESSURE ON THE LABOR GOVERNMENT. FRY SAID IT WAS DISHEARTENING THAT THOSE CHARGED WITH THE MANAGEMENT OF AUSTRALIA'S FOREIGN RELATIONS WERE UNWILLING TO TAKE POSITIVE STEPS TO ASSIST EAST TIMOR.

8. FRY REPEATEDLY INSISTED THAT THE GROUP SAW OR HEARD NO EVIDENCE OF COMMUNIST INVOLVEMENT IN ANY OF THE GROUPS THEY CONTACTED IN EAST TIMOR. THE CHINESE IN THE AREA ARE TAIWANESE, AND THE PORTUGUESE AND LOCALS WHOM THEY MEET COULD BEST BE CLASSIFIED AS CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS. THE ONLY PERSON WHO CLAIMED THERE WERE COMMUNISTS IN THE AREA WAS A CATHOLIC BISHOP, AND HE COULD NOT GIVE ANY EVIDENCE, VERBAL OR OTHERWISE, TO BACK UP THIS ASSERTION.

9. FRY SAID THAT EAST TIMOR SEEMED BETTER EQUIPPED FOR INDEPENDENCE THAN PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND MANY INDEPENDENT AFRICAN STATES, AND THAT AUSTRALIA SHOULD ASSIST THEM. HE ALSO NOTED THAT RAMOS-HORTA WOULD BE COMING TO CANBERRA SOON TO TAKE A CRASH COURSE IN
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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AT THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY WHICH HAD BEEN SPECIALLY ARRANGED BY A PRIVATE GROUP OF AUSTRALIANS. FRY DID NOT RPT NOT SPECIFY WHO THE AUSTRALIANS WERE.

10. NUMBER OF RECENT INDICATIONS SUGGEST FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF PORTUGUESE TIMOR MAY BECOME MUCH MORE SUBSTANTIAL ISSUE WITHIN AUSTRALIA THAN IT IS AT PRESENT. EMBASSY VIEWS ON THIS SUBJECT IN SEPTEL.
HARROP

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LEGISLATORS, VISITS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 27 MAR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: MartinML
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975CANBER01891
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750107-0481
From: CANBERRA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750311/aaaaajgv.tel
Line Count: 163
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 CANBERRA 1694
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: MartinML
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 13 JUN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <13 JUN 2003 by ifshinsr>; APPROVED <12 NOV 2003 by MartinML>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: VISIT OF AUSTRALIAN ALP PARLIAMENTARIANS TO PORTUGUESE TIMOR
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, AS, PT, ID, (KERIN, JOHN)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006